MAKING MEANING OF CONTENT THROUGH DISCIPLINARY WRITING ACTIVITIES

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Abstract: Demonstrating communication competency is essential within all disciplines, regardless of whether our students are studying humanities, social sciences, or the natural and physical sciences. Teachers rely on students’ abilities to communicate what they know in order to assess their learning outcomes. But how do we distinguish between disjointed communication skills and incomplete understanding? Why not guide students to make meaning of their discipline before they are expected to communicate it? My research is grounded in writing-to-learn (WTL) and writing in the disciplines (WID) literature and centers on studying how students make meaning of their disciplinary content through speaking, reading, and writing activities. Helping students organize their thoughts through WTL strategies can help majors, non-majors, first year students, and graduating seniors. I will share some of my research on WTL in small undergraduate laboratory courses, as well as in larger lecture courses. These studies demonstrate that writing activities can improve students’ abilities to make evidence-based claims. In the workshop we will engage in our writing activities and will construct writing assignments for your students. We will distinguish between WTL and WID, or disciplinary communication. Through the workshop we will identify multiple types of disciplinary writing relevant to our respective content areas, so we can design meaningful writing activities in our courses. In addition, we share with one another useful assessment strategies and management approaches so we can support peer review and instructor feedback.